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Introduction

As a painter, I find there is something about opening up to the Divine whisper, to the Divine leading, to the Divine unfolding within each of us that is revealed for me at the canvas. For me ‘creativity’ is synonymous with experiencing God’s presence. Our practices of restoration, creativity and spirituality are so fully intertwined.

What is the life you dream of? What do you feel called to do? What do you think could transform your life? What would you like to make time and space for in your life? What practices help you experience God’s loving presence? How can you bring these practices into your life more frequently? These are the questions we will explore in this series.

This workbook includes the voices of many creative people in my life. What an honor it has been to interview people with practices in painting, photography, dance, music, poetry, meditation, and more. It was truly inspiring and humbling to hear about the beginnings, the curiosity, the overcoming barriers, the courage, and the rhythms of discipline and care present in each of these practices for each of these people.

My intention in this book is to nurture a conversation about creating habits, thought patterns, and systems that can help you to step into the life you really want.

In exploring these themes, you may choose to take a small step; it may be a baby step, but a step nonetheless. There is so much breadth and depth of wisdom in each story shared in this workbook. I know that you have great wisdom within you as well.

With any goal we set—whether to tame our anger, to eat healthier, to exercise more, to be on time—there is an invitation to grow and be steadfast in the face of anticipated barriers. There is something about setting an intention to do something that presents opportunities to face resistance and negativity. It challenges us to become courageous and trust in a power beyond (or perhaps within) us to overcome.

It is my hope that in exploring this content you might find the “umph”, the courage needed to discover, begin, restart, or continue an important practice in your life. This practice will take different forms for each of us, and will vary with time, yet each of us has the power to engage in a

fulfilling life, a life with curiosity, a life willing to move past resistance, a life of courage. The vitality of this movement in our lives can bring hope and joy to us and the people around us.

Although this workbook can certainly be used independently, it was created with group use in mind. We have all seen the benefit of working together with a friend or group on an intention or goal. We know that when there is accountability and care and encouragement we are more likely to succeed. So grab a few friends, and see how you can encourage one another in this effort today.

~ Bronwen

How to Use This Workbook

Working on expanding restorative practices has the power to change your life. As with any significant commitment, though, you will likely feel resistance at times. Support from others can make a big difference. For this reason, this workbook is designed to be used in a group setting. (See Appendix A for more information about how to lead a small group.) Please adapt the contents in whatever way works best for you. In each chapter you'll find the following elements:

- **Introduction & Reading:** Introduces the week's content and scriptural reading.
- **Activity:** Gets you thinking about how you'll apply the week's content to your own life. The activity is a great launch point for group discussion.
- **Daily Study:** Provides five days of readings and reflections to help inspire mindful communication (to be read outside of the group meeting.)

Creativity Journal

Every day, countless insights and questions arise. If we don't write anything down though, it's easy to let the insights slip away. A notebook or journal can be a great way to observe your thoughts related to the readings, group activities, our creative endeavors, and weekly practices. You may find that regular journaling helps release your mental clutter and opens you to inspiration.



WEEK ONE

Beginning



Beginning ¹

Small Group

Look for these grey boxes for small group application.

Begin your first small group meeting by taking time to introduce yourself. What is your intention/focus in participating in this series?

Together, review small group guidelines from Appendix A.

Offer a prayer or moment of meditation, then give everyone a chance to introduce themselves. Follow by reading aloud the introduction and scriptural focus. Give the group a chance to discuss the reading, and/or participate in the described activity in the following pages.

Introduction

Every single moment of a person's life, both of the understanding and of the will, is a new beginning.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 3854:3 Emanuel Swedenborg

We have so many opportunities to begin again. Beginning something new can be invigorating. It can also be terrifying. What does scripture teach us about beginnings? There is a lot of beauty to behold in every beginning. It is wonderful to see how God is present in it all, present in the joy and the struggle.

It helps to approach a new venture with humility, not fully knowing how the path will unfold. This brings lightness and joy, and also a sense of openness. In scripture we have beautiful images of light and dark being present together. This was depicted in the story of creation and we can anticipate the presence of light and dark in our re-creation and in any of our creative endeavors. We need not wait for a time that is all light.

One of the biggest challenges in beginning is the thought, “Where will I find the time?” Finding time can be hard, but it comes down to priorities. We might ask ourselves, “Where am I resting in my life? Am I slowing down enough to reconnect with God? Do I have time for pursuits of the heart? What do I have to give up to make time?” We can look at the words of Jesus in the following scriptural focus, as He honors a woman who sits rests rather than works, who focuses first on being present with Him before being busy: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

In many ways opening to God’s presence, creativity, in our lives is challenging because our lives are so full. We are in such a hurry to get to the next thing, we are so distracted by screens and devices, that we miss the chances to be still and quiet. More than ever in the history of humanity do we have the option to numb out and escape our present moment. And yet we learn from scripture that this is not a completely new development. Even in the days Jesus walked the earth people found themselves too busy to spend time with Him. Consider this story and the lessons for us on our path.

Scriptural Focus: Creating Space

Jesus encouraging slowing down, resting, spending time in His presence.



Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”

And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

—Luke 10:38-42

Discussion & Activity

Together as a group, discuss the questions, and participate in the activity listed.

Discussion Questions

- How is the busy factor of your life?
- Where could you find more stillness?
- What could you stop doing to create time for more restorative practices?

Group Activity

List 25 things that you would do in your dream life, if there were no limitations of time, money, travel, no constraints.

Choose Your Focus

Each week choose where you will put your focus. Sometimes sharing an intention with others can be an effective motivator.

Examples:

This week I will focus on spending 1 hour with my restorative practice at least 4 days this week.

This week I will focus on sharing my creative work with others.

This week I will begin each morning in meditation.

This week I will try out a new restorative practice I've always wanted to try.

This week I will focus on:

Now begins five days of readings for individual study.

Day One

Created to Create

The first words of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void...” There is an important lesson here for us about God’s creation. In the beginning, there is a void. We don’t yet know how things will go. But out of this void, God creates life. Similarly, we can start right now. We don’t have to wait for the perfect time for spiritual practice, for experiencing God’s presence, or for creativity to begin. We don’t have to wait until there is only light and flow and goodness in our life. We can begin now. In the void. Right here. We can begin knowing God is doing the work, the creating, the bringing of peace and joy. We show up, do our practice and maybe God uses us to create something beautiful. Sometimes this showing up is in the face of crisis, in the face of great darkness.



In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

—Genesis 1:1-5



We are because God is.

—*Divine Providence* 46 Emanuel Swedenborg



I paint because of what it does to me spiritually. To get in touch with the part of me that wants to create.

—Frank Rose, Painter



We are created to create, that we need to create in order to truly fulfill the Lord’s plan in creating us. We are part of ‘the force’ of His creation. He produces all things of nature in His infinite providence. We are created in His image and therefore need to gather what we know from our understand-

Day Two

Act Precedes

We don't have to be ready. We can begin. We can lean into trust, that the desire and readiness will follow.



Act precedes, and willing follows; for that which we do from the understanding, we at last do from the will, and finally we put it on as a habit; and it is then instilled in our rational or inner self.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 4353, Emanuel Swedenborg

Stephen describes how he has to put himself in the path of inspiration.



I go out on walks four nights a week after dinner to take photos, and I shoot until the sun goes down. I try to make it a regular thing. One of the things about photography is you won't get any good shots by sitting on a couch. Like anything creative, you have to make yourself available to it. Part of my regular practice is making myself available to what nature brings—what is around me. It doesn't mean anything will happen on any given night. But if I don't go out, it won't happen.

—Stephen Conroy, Photographer



Four years ago, I found ballroom dancing by accident. I was choreographing as part of my job as a high school dance teacher and I needed professional help with a musical that involved ballroom dancing. So my work paid for me to take ballroom lessons to choreograph the show. I almost immediately fell in love with it—I knew right away that this is what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I completely shifted how I spent my time and money to try to fit it in my life. It was a huge gift the universe gave me. It was such a gift to know there is something that makes sense that I am supposed to be doing.

—Sarah Gladish, Ballroom Dancer



Start before you're ready.

—Steven Pressfield, Writer

Day Three

Pray and Ask

As we begin new endeavors, invite the Lord into the process.



Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

—John 3:16



We frequently read that the Lord answers when people call on Him or cry out to Him, and that He gives to people when they ask. Yet, even so, it is the Lord who gives people to ask and what they should ask for, and the Lord knows it, therefore, beforehand. But still it is the Lord's will that a person first ask, in order that the person may do so as though on his own.

—*Apocalypse Revealed* 376, Emanuel Swedenborg



How to Be a Poet

Make a place to sit down.
Sit down. Be quiet.
You must depend upon affection, reading, knowledge, skill—more of each than you have—inspiration, work, growing older, patience, for patience joins time to eternity. Any readers who like your poems, doubt their judgment.

Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.

Communicate slowly. Live a three-dimensional life; stay away from screens. Stay away from anything that obscures the place it is in. There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.

Accept what comes from silence. Make the best you can of it. Of the little words that come out of the silence, like prayers prayed back to the one who prays, make a poem that does not disturb the silence from which it came.

—Wendell Berry



To begin you must first look into your heart. What moves you? What touches you? Creativity always begins in the heart.

—Frank Rose, Painter



Be willing to be a beginner every single morning.

—Meister Eckhart, German Theologian

Individual Activity

Spend 5 minutes reflecting on the quote, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (John 3:16).

Emphasizing different words each time you repeat it aloud or silently to yourself. This is a form of an ancient practice known as *lectio divina* where one holds scripture in meditation and prayer. Through repetition we gain deeper discovery of the message for our lives.

Day Four

Sabbath as a Gift

What if you believed that God wanted you to restore your soul? What if you believed in a God who thought rest was noble and worthwhile? Well this is just what scripture describes in the Hebrew Bible and the Ten Commandments. God literally commands that we are to remember the Sabbath. Not as a burden, but as a gift.



Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

—Exodus 20:8-11



I was very inspired by Wendell Berry's Sabbath walks. Every Sunday he would go for a Sabbath walk and he would write a poem. He would go into a meditative state. I was so inspired by that, that I started these walks. I felt in doing it I was seeing the world differently—new eyes, finding beauty everywhere I went. Then I started trying to write poetry through that, and it just wasn't flowing. Then after my wife had done a 365 challenge with photography, I thought maybe I'd pick up the camera and try that. I went on these walks with my camera. People saw my work and encouraged me to do more. I felt it was capturing the thing I was trying to capture with poetry in less verbal form. That is how it started. I go out and discover things, bring them back, and share them with people.

—Stephen Conroy, Photographer



The best thing I can say about how I feel when I'm dancing is completely embodied. I don't remember anything else going on in the world besides the person I'm working with, whatever teacher or partner, the music, and my body. Later I come out of it and realize I didn't think

Day Five

Encouragement

There is something sacred and precious about beginnings. There is something powerful about being in a supportive community environment where people believe in you. This support and encouragement makes for rich soil from which our practices grow.



Behold I am making all things new.

—Revelation 21:5



Everyone has their own door. There is no wrong way to meditate. The other day I was doing meditation with my small group and one person says, “I’m doing it wrong. My mind won’t shut off.” That is exactly what is supposed to happen—your mind isn’t going to shut off. Then another person had this beautiful description of leaves floating down a river, and each thought placed on a leaf on that river. You aren’t shutting out your thoughts. You aren’t making your thoughts bad. You are just saying, “Oh, here you are. Put it on the stream and let it flow away.” No judgment.

—Rachel Adams, Meditation Practitioner



When I was growing up our family motto was “You can do anything”. This was a very liberating family motto. So many people get the opposite message. I was blessed with a stimulating environment. A house full of interesting people. Lots of freedom. Making a mess was not a problem. Our house was always a mess. When I started painting early on, I got a lot of positive feedback. People would say, “That is wonderful!” People liked what I did so I did more of it.

—Frank Rose, Painter



I have some dyslexia. In high school I started drawing. I had a friend whose mom was an artist. Seeing her gave me an example of what an artist can be, and helped mentor me. I thought maybe I could do this too. Then I just started doing it. It was a way to express myself. I learned art wasn’t just pretty pictures but ideas that allowed me to engage my brain and work in the style that was natural to it. Language is not natural

